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TEACHING FOR STUDENTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

by  
Edgar M. Kugler

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for the Degree of Doctor of Education  
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Under the Supervision of Professor J. Galen Saylor

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE SCHOOL OBSERVATION PROGRAM INCLUDED AS A PART OF  
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IN SECONDARY EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

BY

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FOR THE  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE

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EMK

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As things are at present, the observation of teaching is an activity pursued without much system. It is conducted without adequate preliminary or immediate intelligence, and the judgments to which it leads are not subsequently subjected to much critical thought. All this carelessness must be corrected if we are to have a stable method of improving the practice of teaching, one free from dependence on personal intuitions and chance impressions.<sup>1</sup>

The above statement, although written in 1917 by the first eminent authority in the education field on the improvement of school observations, appears as true today as then according to present-day educational authorities.

Teacher education is generally recognized as a multiple-faceted program of which school observations are a vital part. Most educational authorities agree that it can be classified as one of the essential elements of a good teacher preparation program. Although school observations have been recognized as an essential aspect of the teacher education program, there are a number of problems which have not been solved completely by those responsible for implementing the program. A sampling of the many unanswered questions about school observations follows:

What kinds of school observations are best?

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<sup>1</sup>C. R. Maxwell, The Observation of Teaching (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), p. v.

Can the teacher-education program furnish realistic, life-like school observations?

How many school observations per course, and in which courses should they be included?

When should school observations start in a prospective teacher's program?

What should be the relationship between individual observations and group observations?

Should school observations of actual teaching situations precede or follow the discussion of theory in the teachers college classes?

No investigation has been reported in which an evaluation of the school observation program in secondary education at the University of Nebraska has been made. In view of this, the present study was undertaken.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study has been to evaluate the program of school observations included as a part of professional education prior to student teaching of students specializing in secondary education at the University of Nebraska in courses designated Ed. 141, Principles and Practices of Teaching in Secondary Schools, and Ed. 121, Special Methods in Teaching High School Subjects. This evaluation included the following objectives:

1. Determine the objectives of the observation programs in these two courses.
2. Determine the extent to which the objectives are attained in these two courses.

3. Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the observation programs in these two courses.
4. Determine recommended changes in the observational programs in these two courses.

### Background of the Study

Having experienced an inadequate school observation program in his own teacher preparation program and having been actively engaged in scheduling and evaluating in part the school observation program in principles and practices of teaching in secondary school courses, the author developed an interest in and an awareness of the need for improving school observations in teacher education program.

As a graduate assistant in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Nebraska during the first and second semesters of 1958-59, and again a year later as a part-time instructor in the same department, the nature of the researcher's duties and responsibilities in these capacities were such as to put him in direct and personal contact with the school observation experiences in those years. From these beginnings the author's interest in school observations evolved.

The school observation program in other Teachers College courses at the University of Nebraska is extremely limited at present. In the introductory courses open to freshmen and sophomores, little or no school observation

experiences are attempted. The educational psychology courses required in the sophomore or junior years offer only limited case study experiences with individual or small groups of youngsters in situations devoid of a good teaching-learning process. No organized school observations are obtainable on either an individual or group basis in these courses. Finally, in the junior or senior years prior to his practice teaching assignment, the student may or may not, depending upon the instructor, make some limited school observations in his special method course (Ed. 121). These courses, for the most part, generally complete his teacher preparation program prior to student teaching with few, limited, school-observation experiences in the offering.

In recent years, the established procedure in the general methods course, Ed. 141, Principles and Practices in Teaching in Secondary Schools, is to make the observations in either the student's major or minor subject matter field. The first observation is normally scheduled in one of the eight Lincoln public junior high schools. The second observation is made at one of the three Lincoln public senior high schools, and the third and fourth are in classes at the University High School.

Because certification requires preparation in two fields, and because it is not an uncommon practice in Nebraska high schools to assign teachers in two or more

subject areas, there seems to be real merit in the practice of assigning observers to two different fields. There was generally a two- to three-week period between each of the four observations which covered a two- to three-month period. Up to this time, the nature and organization of the Ed. 141 course did not readily permit additional school observations even though they may have had real value for the student. Four to six different instructors teach this course, and although each tries to bear in mind a continuity of purpose in preparing his respective students for the observation experience, the written observation reports read by the author as a graduate assistant were frequently completely different in both analysis and evaluation of the experience.

The reason for relating the procedures and the author's connection with the past and present school-observation program is to give the reader of this paper a general understanding of this educational experience and the problems associated with its successful operation. Educators at the University of Nebraska and elsewhere are faced with the problem of whether their present observation programs are making an adequate educational return for the time and effort expended.

Prior to choosing this topic for his dissertation, the author spent many hours reading about and discussing the problem with his colleagues in the graduate school, professors in all departments of Teachers College, University of Nebraska, undergraduate students in Teachers College,

teachers and administrators in the field, and even lay personnel who intimated an interest in the topic. All of them felt a definite need for a study of this problem.

Invariably the chance remarks and comments concerning school-observation experiences speculated on the following themes:

There is a definite need for more observations.

They should start in freshmen and sophomore courses early in the teachers college program.

Theory in teaching methods and techniques will become more understandable if the students have had a chance to observe actual practice.

There should be more study of all phases of the high school program before one starts practice teaching.

Most student teachers feel that they would have done a better job in their practice-teaching experience if they had had more practical observations prior to that time.

The various philosophies of education and teaching methods can be best learned in an actual classroom situation.

Observing classroom situations early in one's professional education would help determine whether one would like to continue in Teachers College.

Observations should be done on both the elementary and secondary level and included in all classes.

Evans<sup>2</sup> gives added emphasis to the above statements by declaring that there is a definite need for more

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<sup>2</sup>Clara Evans, "Class Observation--Participation as a Factor in Training Teachers," Journal of Educational Research, 37:142-145 (October), 1943.

participation in and an analysis of school observations in the teacher-education program.

Flowers in his famous report states:

Direct laboratory experiences, therefore, should be an integral part of the work of each of the four years of college. This concept is best realized when:

1. Laboratory experiences prior to student teaching are integrated with other parts of the college program. The student derives more from his laboratory contacts prior to student teaching when they grow out of and are brought back to his work in college courses than when they comprise a separate and independent series of guided experiences.<sup>3</sup>

Most educators, like Maxwell, feel that ". . . classroom observation must be systematic rather than impressionistic if it is to be valuable."<sup>4</sup> Too often student-observers, and college teachers too, rely exclusively on what they happen to see at the time in the classroom. The danger is that what they see may be conditioned excessively by the particular educational doctrines and/or interests they may happen to have in mind at that particular moment. It is also possible that whatever they observe must be placed in its proper context to be fully understood.

Maxwell<sup>5</sup> insists that careful preparation of the student prior to the actual visiting of the classroom is

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<sup>3</sup>John G. Flowers, "Recommended Standards Governing Professional Laboratory Experiences and Student Teaching," The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, First Yearbook (Oneonta, N. Y.: The Association, 1948), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>Maxwell, op. cit., p. vi.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. vii.

needed. Moreover, it would appear that a good critique of the observation by an experienced observer and the participants is essential for the attainment of the goals of good observation.

One needs to recognize that the absence of an adequate preliminary theory for the observer may result in misguided practices and false conclusions by the student from the experience. To be specific, it is entirely possible that:

The student doesn't know upon what to focus his attention.

The student returns to his theory class with his mind confused with desultory detail.

The student has no method of telling what he has observed except by relating an ordinary narration and description of the visit.

Consequently, such students may gain little or nothing of any pedagogical significance. This period of observation, then, is practically wasted.

Challenged by these remarks and comments, as well as the statements from the literature, the author decided to investigate the educational implications of the school-observation program in greater detail by way of reviewing the literature on the subject, applying evaluation-type questionnaires to select groups of students and graduates of the University of Nebraska, and personally interviewing selected members of the faculty of the University of Nebraska's Teachers College, staff personnel of University

High School, and administrators and teachers of the Lincoln public school system to determine the effectiveness of the present observation program.

### Delimitations of the Problem

The study will be concerned only with the school observation program included as a part of professional education prior to student teaching for students in secondary education at the University of Nebraska.

The study was confined to the following groups:

1. Those faculty members of Teachers College, University of Nebraska, who were or are actively engaged in teaching Ed. 141 and Ed. 121.
2. Students enrolled in all sections of Ed. 141 during the second semester of 1959-60, the summer session of 1960, and the first semester of 1960-61.
3. Students enrolled in only those sections of Ed. 121 which had a school observation program during the second semester of 1959-60 and the first semester of 1960-61.
4. Students enrolled in Ed. 123, Student Teaching, in either University High School or the Lincoln public high school system during the first semester of 1960-61.
5. Graduates of the University of Nebraska, who specialized in secondary education and who were actively engaged in secondary school teaching for the first time during the first semester of 1960-61.

### Definition of a Term

The term, observation, as defined in this study is the act of the student-in-training participating by listening and seeing a formal program of teaching, classroom management, or administration of the school situation in a scheduled arrangement.

### Procedure

The following steps have been employed to study the problem:

- A. A survey of related literature has been made.
- B. The objectives of the school observation program included as a part of professional education prior to student teaching for students in secondary education at the University of Nebraska have been determined in the following manner:
  1. A suggested list of appropriate objectives were designed and sent to all faculty members of Teachers College, University of Nebraska, during the second semester of 1959-60, who were or had been active in the teaching of Ed. 141 and Ed. 121. Six of six instructors of Ed. 141 and 15 of 17 instructors of Ed. 121 participated in the definition of objectives. The faculty members were instructed

to state whether the objective listed was an essential one, a desirable, but secondary objective to the essential ones, or one that was not applicable to their programs of observation. Each person was encouraged to add other objectives.

2. Responses by these faculty members to this list of objectives were compiled and after personal interviews with selected members of this group a tentative list of objectives for school observations was established.

C. This list of objectives became the basis for making an evaluation of the observation program. The writer designed several instruments for use in determining the extent to which these objectives were being achieved in the observation programs of Ed. 141 and Ed. 121.

1. The evaluative instrument, shown in Appendix B, was given to 88 students enrolled in four sections of Ed. 121 at the end of the second semester of 1959-60. These four sections participated in four individual observations: two in University High School; one in a Lincoln public junior high school; one in a Lincoln public senior high school.
2. The same questionnaire was given at the end

of the second semester of 1959-60 to 107 students registered for the eight sections of Ed. 121 which had an organized school observation program included in their courses. Most of these were of an individual nature and occurred in University High School. Eight of the 13 sections of Ed. 121 scheduled that semester participated in the study. The subject matter fields represented by the Ed. 121 courses were English, social studies, men's physical education, industrial arts, speech, mathematics, science, and music. The subject matter fields not scheduling observations were art, general business and bookkeeping, shorthand and typing, girl's physical education, and modern languages.

3. The questionnaire was given to a third group of 24 students who were enrolled in two sections of Ed. 141 during the summer session of 1960. All made individual observations in University High School.
4. The questionnaire was given to a fourth group, composed of 136 students enrolled in six sections of Ed. 141, at the end of the first semester of 1960-61. These sections were classified into the following three sub-groups:

- a. Four sections of the course, totaling 71 students, participated in the conventional-type of observation program of four required individual observations: two in University High School, one in a Lincoln public junior high school, and one in a Lincoln public senior high school.
- b. One section of 27 students experienced six individual observations, all in University High School. These students scheduled their own time and class for the observations. Four of these observations were in classes in the subject matter fields of English, social studies, science, and mathematics; one in a class in a skill subject, like typing or industrial arts, and one in an extra-curricular activity like a basketball game, or a class play.
- c. One section with 28 students experienced twelve required observations: eight in University High School of which six were of an individual nature similar to those made by the section described in (b) above and two were made as a class group (physics and modern problems); four individual ones in the Lincoln public high school system, two

in **junior** high schools, two in senior high schools.

5. The questionnaire was given to 46 students at the end of the first semester of 1960-61 in four sections of Ed. 121 which had an organized school observation program during that semester. Only four of the 13 Ed. 121 courses of that semester participated in the study. The subject matter fields represented in the previous semester study but absent this semester were mathematics, music, speech and hearing therapy (speech offered the previous semester) and industrial arts (not offered this semester). For the second straight semester no observations were made by students enrolled in method's classes in art, general business and bookkeeping, shorthand and typing, girl's physical education, latin, and modern languages.

- D. A second evaluation-type questionnaire shown in Appendix E, was designed for the 1960 University of Nebraska graduates in the field of secondary education who were in their first year of teaching. From records available in the offices of the University of Nebraska's Placement Service Division, Director of Student Teaching, and the

Alumni file, 225 graduates were listed as engaged in teaching or no information was available. On the first return it was discovered that only 165 of that number were actually teaching. Of the other 60 graduates, 35 were women, married, and not teaching, or men, serving in the armed forces; 15 were not actually first-year teachers, or were home economics and vocational agriculture majors and consequently did not take Ed. 141 and 121; and 10 graduates could not be located as they had moved and did not leave a forwarding address. In the final results 136 of the 165 first-year teachers filled-out and returned the questionnaire. This is a 82 per cent return on the questionnaire.

- E. This questionnaire was also filled out by 112 students enrolled in Ed. 123, Student Teaching, during the first semester of 1960-61. The 112 responding was 95 per cent of the total enrollment in Ed. 123 for the first semester of 1960-61.
- F. Data received from the various groups which filled out one or the other of the two questionnaires were tabulated by groups by per cent of responses and analyzed for the purpose of evaluating the existing school observation program in Ed. 141 and Ed. 121.